

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EA-11 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 OMB-01 DRC-01 /104 W  
----- 116832

R 011135Z JUN 74

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5683

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 3370

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR

SUBJECT: BOURGUIBA'S VISIT TO CHINA REPORTEDLY OFF

1. RUMORS THAT PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S VISIT TO CHINA IS OFF  
BEGAN SURFACING IN TUNIS EVENING MAY 30. BY LATE AFTERNOON  
MAY 31 BELIEF THAT SUCH IS CASE WAS WIDESPREAD AMONG AMBASSADORS,  
SOME OF WHOM ARE CONVINCED THAT IT WILL NOT TAKE PLACE,  
TURKISH AMBASSADOR CONFIRMED TO CHARGE THAT HE WAS TOLD BY TUN-  
ISIANS TWO DAYS AGO PROPOSED STOPOVER IN TURKEY ON  
RETURN FROM CHINA WOULD NOT TAKE PLACE. REASON  
REPORTEDLY GIVEN CHINESE IS ILLNESS OF PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA  
WHICH IS OF SUCH NATURE AS TO PRECLUDE HIS TAKING  
FULL CHARGE WHILE BOURGUIBA AWAY. STORIES DO NOT YET INDICATE  
WHETHER VISIT CANCELLED OR POSTPONED.

2. REPORTED ILLNESS OF NOUIRA APPEARS BE CENTRAL TO DEVELOPMENTS.  
PRESS MORNING JUNE 1 CARRIED STATEMENT FROM PRESIDENTIAL  
PALACE SIGNED BY TWO DOCTORS THAT NOUIRA HAD A DIGESTIVE ILLNESS  
("AFFECTION") RECENTLY WHICH HAD CONFINED HIM TO BED FOR SEVERAL  
DAYS AND LED TO CONSULTATIONS BETWEEN HIS DOCTORS AND PROFESSOR  
CAROLI (A FRENCH DOCTOR WELL KNOWN HERE WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY  
TREATED BOURGUIBA FOR HEPATITIS). STATEMENT ADDED THAT NOUIRA  
IS COMPLETELY RESTORED TO HEALTH (RETABLI) BUT A PERIOD OF THREE  
WEEK'S  
CONVALESCENCE IS EXPRESSLY RECOMMENDED. MANY OBSERVERS HERE WILL SEE  
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STATEMENT AS BEING DIRECTLY LINKED TO CHINESE TRIP.

3. NOUIRA'S ILLNESS HAS BEEN SUBJECT OF MUCH SPECULATION FOR PAST WEEK. STORY HAS BEEN GOING AROUND TOWN THAT PRESIDENT EN ROUTE TO COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING MAY 23 WAS STOPPED TWICE BY PROTESTING GROUPS, ONE OF STRIKERS, THE SECOND OF WOMEN RECENTLY LAID OFF AT TEXTILE PLANT, ONE WOMAN TRIED GIVE HIM A PETITION. BOURGUIBA FIRST REFUSED, THEN ACCEPTED IT. AT MEETING HE REPORTEDLY EXPRESSED EXTREME DISPLEASURE THAT HE WAS NOT BEING KEPT INFORMED ABOUT PROBLEMS IN HIS COUNTRY.

NOUIRA'S ILLNESS BEGAN AT THAT POINT AND THERE HAS SINCE BEEN MUCH SPECULATION AS TO WHETHER ILLNESS HAS BEEN REAL OR DIPLOMATIC OR PERHAPS BOTH. NOUIRA, HOWEVER, DID SHOW UP IN PRESIDENT'S COMPANY AT PRESENTATION OF FRENCH PLAY AT PALACE AFTERNOON MAY 31 IN FULL VIEW OF MANY CABINET MEMBERS AND HEADS OF DIPLOMATIC MISSION.

4. COMMENT: IN VIEW OF INFO REPORTED ATT-1810, WE ARE INCLINED BELIEVE

THAT CHINESE TRIP IS IN FACT OFF, AT LEAST FOR NOW. REAL REASON WHY BOURGUIBA HAS CHANGED HIS MIND IS UNCERTAIN. NOUIRA'S ILLNESS MAY WELL BE ALL THERE IS TO IT. WHETHER BOURGUIBA ALSO HAS IN BACK OF HIS MIND IDEA THAT HE WANTS BE AVAILABLE DURING PRESIDENT NIXON'S POSSIBLE TRIP TO MIDDLE EAST AS SUGGESTED ATT-1810 IS AT THIS TIME SPECULATIVE. THERE IS HOWEVER, NO OTHER POLITICAL FACTOR WE AWARE OF WHICH MIGHT UNDERLINE HIS CHANGE OF PLAN.

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